

October 7, 2015

Joel Windsor  
27 High Ridge Court NW  
High River, Alberta  
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Attention: Honourable David Eggen, Minister of Education  
204 Legislature Building  
10800 - 97 Avenue NW  
Edmonton, AB T6K 2B6

Dear Minister,

I write first of all to thank you for being honest with Albertans with regards to completion timelines for school construction projects. This is also a perfect time for me to follow-up on an important, albeit brief, conversation you and I had when we met at the Alberta Teachers' Association Summer Conference in August of this year. In particular, I wish to follow-up on the concerns I expressed over the underlying values behind school construction projects, as exemplified by issues in the Okotoks region.

At the time you had just announced to teachers that you had found full funding for all school construction projects announced by the previous government. We were of course pleased, however I was hesitant because I also knew you had just funded projects that you had no hand in approving. At the time, I asked that you review the decisions for each project to ensure they fit with your values and your party's values of community development. I'm sure most projects do, but in the case of one example I provided you, that is not the case.

The Foothills School Division has a school approved for construction at a site just outside Aldersyde, 10 kilometers east of Okotoks and approximately 30 kilometers south of Calgary. The purpose of this selected site is to house high school students who currently attend the Foothills Composite High School/Alberta High School for the Fine Arts (FCHS/AHSFA) campus. The original FCHS/AHSFA campus will be repurposed for use by Kindergarten through Grade 9 students who currently attend Westmount and Dr. Morris Gibson schools in Okotoks.

The decision to build a school in Aldersyde, and not in Okotoks, was one the Foothills School Division had to make at the time due to a complete lack of space in that town for the foreseeable future. As of August of this year, that issue no longer exists. The Town of Okotoks purchased land neighbouring its borders (known by many locals as the Wedderburn lands) with the expressed intention of using it to provide space to allow the Foothills School Division to build its new high school closer to and inside of what will be town limits.

I was disheartened to hear that the Foothills School Division chose to proceed with constructing a high school facility outside of a community, and had received the endorsement of Alberta Education to do so. I am asking that you consider the following points with regards to this school project;

- **The proposed Aldersyde location is in an industrial zone.** This presents safety concerns of their own, and detaches the school from the ability of developing a community atmosphere, a value you and the Alberta NDP have articulated often. Students produce a certain amount of

economic benefit to the businesses in a community as well, which is not possible in an industrial zone. *The Wedderburn site is across the street from an already existing school in the Christ the Redeemer School Division, is slated to include other community engagement facilities, and has more economic opportunity as well, making it already a hub of community activity.*

- **The transportation infrastructure is inadequate at the proposed Aldersyde location.** Highway 7 intersects with Highway 2A and the Highway 2 interchange at the entrance to the proposed site. All industrial traffic as well as much of the traffic from Okotoks and High River make use of this intersection, and adding vehicles for 900 students and the school staff everyday would make that intersection more unsafe than it already is. *The transportation infrastructure at the Wedderburn site would need ammendment as well, but those edits are already anticipated to occur anyway.*
- **The proposed Aldersyde location is too far away from First Responders.** In the event of a fire emergency, the nearest firehall is the volunteer detachment in Okotoks 10 minutes away, and the second fully-staffed firehall is even further away yet. Especially in an industrial zone, this window of First Response seems to be wholly inadequate. *The Wedderburn site is 2 kilometers away from the fully-staffed firehall.*
- **The proposed Aldersyde location is too small to accommodate the Foothills School Division's needs.** A history of building new schools too small to accommodate growth exists, as was the case with the Westmount School opened in 2012. By 2014 that school was already over capacity. Attempting to squeeze a high school onto an 8-acre parcel of land removes student capacity, especially when considering the need for specialized programming spaces such as an automotive lab, science lab, theatre and similar spaces. This lack of space would require the school division to build a second school on the Wedderburn lands. Building a second school which costs taxpayers even more money is not a solution to the long-range growth needs. *The Wedderburn has 40 acres available, more than enough to build a single school with ample space alongside neighbouring community engagement facilities without the need for a second phase.*
- **The construction of a school outside of the community it serves does not build community, it erodes it.** It takes a community to raise a child, but what happens when community doesn't exist? Communities are already being eroded by permitting acreages to be built in prime agricultural land, as is the case in Davisburg. The more space there is between neighbours and the less economic activity takes place in those rural areas, the less community connection there is. The fact that two rural schools exist in Davisburg that service the areas surrounding Okotoks (one is currently under construction) encourages that erosion of community. One school is an anomaly, two raises an eyebrow. The construction of a school in Aldersyde sets the trend, and I would suggest it is not a trend that matches your values or the values of your party. *While the Wedderburn lands are not officially inside town limits, they are on the border, and with the purchase of those lands enveloping that land into the town limits is simply a formality.*
- **Consultation with the public and parents has been "peripheral" at best.** I have recycled the term "peripheral" as it was used in an editorial in the local newspaper. Parents are arguing that they have not been asked about the new changes, and that they disagree with those changes. The Foothills School Division has not consulted with the public on the changes, and have rather taken to the media to explain their position rather than truly listen to the family stakeholders.

*The lack of consultation is apparent in the media coverage, and the confusion, disappointment and divisiveness must be addressed.*

In considering these points, I ask that you please get more directly involved in this process. The Alberta NDP government should not be held to decisions made by its predecessor government, especially where the values that you were elected on are not being served. The fact that this project is delayed provides an opportunity for the Alberta NDP to show residents in the Highwood constituency that they truly do have constituents best interests at heart, and demand that the Foothills School Division improve its consultation process.

Following improved consultation, if the Foothills School Division can prove that the Aldersyde location can build community, does not cause a redundancy in the use of tax dollars, and meets the needs of students as the primary stakeholders, then the Aldersyde location should be approved. If the Foothills School Division cannot prove these criteria, the project must be reconsidered with an eye to utilizing the Wedderburn lands the Town of Okotoks has worked so hard to provide, as that location would make the school built there a hub of the community.

In addition to asking you to require the Foothills School Division consult more directly with its stakeholders and place priority on schools as community hubs, I also ask you review those construction projects that have already been approved and for which you have found funding. It is quite possible that there are no other projects that have these issues, but it would be worth reviewing projects that build new schools to ensure they add to a community rather than detract from it.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and passion for Education in Alberta. I look forward to hearing how you will work to ensure safe learning environments that not only maintain, but enhance community living as well.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel Windsor', written in a cursive style.

Joel Windsor,  
High River, Alberta

CC: His Worship Bill Robertson, Mayor of Okotoks  
Mrs. Tanya Thorn, Councillor for the Town of Okotoks  
Mr. Wayne Anderson, Member of Legislative Assembly for Highwood  
Mr. John Bailey, Superintendent of Schools, Foothills School Division No. 38  
Mr. Larry Spilak, Reeve, Municipal District of Foothills No. 31